



A SNAPSHOT OF GEORGIA

STATE OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH

Overview

The State Office of Rural Health (SORH) transitioned from the Department of Human Resources to the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) in 1999. This office manages programs to develop regional, quality health care systems to optimize health status and improve health outcomes in rural and underserved areas of Georgia. During FY 2009, the SORH program budget was \$5,428,070 in state funds and \$7,389,9904 in federal funds; for a total budget of \$12,818,060.

The SORH administers programs to develop financially viable non-traditional regional systems designed to meet the health and service demands of the communities served. The desired outcomes are:

- Improvements in rural health
- A strengthened health care safety net
- The introduction of health care as a strategic industry in Georgia

The SORH provides financial and technical support to select demonstration communities with the leadership and capacity to collaboratively design and implement models that:

- Increase access to integrated health services (physical health, prevention services, behavioral health, etc.)
- Transition to consumer driven health care
- Encourage regionalization of services so that providers are more financially stable
- Use medical technology to improve health outcomes and efficiency
- Ensure the long-term viability of the state's health care safety net
- Ensure continued job opportunities for employees in new roles that support the innovative health care delivery model, as well as creating a strong workforce of healthy citizens

Primary Care Office

The Primary Care Office (PCO) facilitates increased access to primary health care by tracking, placing and coordinating the recruitment of physicians and allied health professionals in underserved areas through the development of Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), rural health clinics and volunteer clinics. The PCO works closely with the Georgia Association of Primary Health Care (GAPHC) to foster the development of FQHCs. Initiatives of the PCO include:

▪ **Federally Qualified Community Health Centers**

The Georgia PCO is currently working cooperatively with GAPHC in order to administer \$2,000,000 in grant funding for FQHC development in Georgia. That funding is applied to the following initiatives:

- \$1,000,000 to expand mental health services in FQHCs
- \$1,000,000 to develop FQHCs in underserved communities

▪ **Professional Shortage Designations**

The PCO evaluates shortage designations to insure that Georgia's underserved communities may participate in federal and state programs targeting their special needs. The shortage designations include Medically Underserved Areas, Health Professional Shortage Areas, Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas and Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas

GEORGIA RURAL HEALTH AT-A-GLANCE

- Georgia has two million rural residents
- 125 Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (MHPSA)*
- 136 as Primary Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA)*
- 94 Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (DHPSA)*
- 67 hospitals are located in rural counties
- There are 27 FQHCs with 121 access points in Georgia

*Note number of DHPSA, MHSPA, & HPSAs fluctuates as HRSA approves them continuously. While there are fewer designated shortage areas, this means that Georgia is doing a better job placing health care professionals in areas of need.

PROGRAMS

- Primary Care Office
- Hospital Services Program
- Georgia Farmworkers' Health Program
- Health care for the Homeless
- Statewide Area Health Education Centers Network
- Networks for Rural Health

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▪ **J-1 Visa Program**

J-1 Visa Program is a state and federal partnership that sponsors international medical graduates who agree to practice primary care in underserved areas for a minimum of three years after completing their residency

▪ **National Health Service Corps (NHSC)**

National Health Service Corps (NHSC) is a federal initiative to assist HPSA communities in developing, recruiting and retaining physicians and other allied health professionals through either loan repayment or scholarships. Currently, there are 40 health professionals in the loan repayment program and 13 NHSC scholars.

🕒 **Hospital Services Program**

Hospital Services Program provides technical assistance and resources principally to rural and Critical Access Hospitals. Federal funds of \$940,278 are received in support of the following grant initiatives:

▪ **Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Grant Program receives up to \$478,210 to:**

- ❑ Facilitate financial efficiency and quality improvement
- ❑ Develop and expand rural health networks
- ❑ Enhance coordination of Emergency Medical Service

▪ **Small Rural Hospital Improvement Program** is a federal grant program providing \$462,068 in FY 2009 to 53 rural hospitals with 49 or less beds to:

- ❑ Enhance quality improvement and reduction of medical errors
- ❑ Facilitate compliance with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- ❑ Facilitate compliance with Prospective Payment System reimbursement methodology

🕒 **Georgia Farmworker Health Program**

Georgia Farmworker Health Program works to improve the general health status of Georgia's migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families by providing cost effective, culturally appropriate primary and preventative health services. Federal funding supporting this effort is \$3,625,084 in FY 2009.

🕒 **Health Care for the Homeless**

Health Care for the Homeless provides primary and preventive health care services to the homeless in Atlanta and Savannah. State funds supporting these efforts are \$406,846.

🕒 **Statewide Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) Network**

The SORH collaborates with the Medical College of Georgia to administer this program. The mission of Statewide Area Health Education Centers Network is to create and sustain community-driven, regional programs promoting health care access for medically underserved Georgians by improving the quality, diversity, education, supply, distribution and retention of health care professionals. State funds supporting these efforts were \$2,075,00 in FY 2009.

🕒 **Networks for Rural Health**

Networks for Rural Health is a grant program designed to help rural providers and community leaders build multi-county regional health care systems which are clinically relevant, financially viable, and improve access to care for the underserved citizens of Georgia.